



## CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION MINUTES

March 02, 2026 at 5:30 PM

7701 County Road 110 West Minnetrista, MN 55364

*Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 13D.02, one or more council members may participate remotely.*

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### 1) CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Whalen called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Council present: Mayor Whalen, Councilmembers Reffkin, Vickery, Lacy, Govern. Staff present: City Administrator Kruggel, Public Works Director Peters, Assistant City Administrator Bauman, Director of Public Safety Squires, City Clerk Meyerhoff (Remote), City Engineer Fauske, City Attorney Sonsalla (Remote).

Mayor Whalen added discussion about the Affordable Housing Bill.

### 2) DISCUSSION ITEMS

#### a) Property Complaints Q1 Check-In

City staff provided an update to the Council regarding two properties previously discussed in late 2025 that have generated ongoing complaints related to ordinance violations and nuisance conditions. The first property, located at 9550 West Hill Road, is the subject of multiple misdemeanor charges tied to city ordinance violations, including unlicensed and inoperable vehicles and excessive outdoor storage. The property owner now has legal representation, with a pretrial hearing scheduled for mid-March. Staff explained that fines alone may not be sufficient to compel cleanup. Given limited cooperation from the owner, the City is considering pursuing an administrative search warrant to access the property, document conditions, and draft a formal nuisance abatement order. If the property is ultimately declared a public nuisance and the owner fails to comply, the City could undertake abatement itself—potentially at a cost estimated between \$50,000 and \$100,000—assessing those costs to the property, though recovery of those funds is uncertain and could lead to tax forfeiture proceedings. Ken Vanderlinde, a neighboring resident spoke during the meeting, expressing longstanding concerns about property devaluation, environmental risks, and ongoing accumulation of materials, and urged the Council to act more quickly.

The second property, 7501 CR 110 W has shown some cooperation from the owners, though progress has slowed in recent months. Council previously granted a cleanup deadline of late spring or early summer. Staff recommended sending a formal reminder outlining expectations and clearly communicating that failure to demonstrate substantial progress by the deadline could trigger the nuisance declaration process, similar to the first property. Council consensus supported accelerating administrative steps where appropriate, including seeking property access and coordinating with legal counsel, while continuing to monitor compliance efforts at both sites.

#### b) Holiday Tree Lighting Event

Council briefly discussed scheduling the annual holiday tree lighting event and tentatively selected Wednesday, November 18, the week before Thanksgiving, to avoid conflicts with neighboring community events. Councilmember Lacy raised concerns

about whether the event should continue, citing staff time and associated costs, and suggested reconsidering its necessity. Others expressed support for maintaining the event, noting its community-building value and positive feedback from attendees.

A compromise was reached to hold the event one more year, move it earlier to improve weather conditions and attendance, and carefully track staff time and related costs. After this year's event, Council will evaluate participation and overall value before deciding whether to continue it in the future or explore alternatives. There was also discussion of potentially involving the Westonka Lions in future years, depending on the outcome of this year's evaluation.

c) State of MN Fraud Discussion

The Mayor noted that Andrew Myers was present for the scheduled fraud discussion but requested that Council first address the proposed housing bill due to its urgency. With a committee meeting occurring the following day, the Mayor emphasized the importance of ensuring the full Council understands the details of the bill and can provide clear direction after discussion. Council agreed to prioritize the housing bill conversation before moving on to the fraud agenda item and thanked Andrew for attending.

Andrew Myers provided an update on the recently released housing bill, noting it was introduced Friday and is scheduled for committee discussion the following day. He explained that the proposal has evolved over the past three years but still includes provisions that would reduce local zoning control, particularly for metro-area cities over 2,500 in population and rural cities over 5,000. Myers shared that he has submitted four amendments: raising the population threshold (proposing exemptions for cities under 10,000 or 5,000, though he acknowledged the higher threshold is unlikely to advance), increasing minimum lot size requirements from one-eighth acre to one-quarter acre, and delaying implementation until 2029 to avoid costly and duplicative comprehensive plan updates. He stated he does not currently support the bill in its present form and emphasized that it will require bipartisan support to pass.

Council members raised concerns about the bill's intent, questioning whether it primarily benefits developers and affordable rental housing interests rather than addressing community-specific housing needs. Myers responded that supporters cite a statewide housing shortage—often referenced as approximately 100,000 units—but acknowledged frustrations about one-size-fits-all mandates and the erosion of local control. Discussion also touched on energy code mandates and building regulations that may increase housing costs, with Myers noting he introduced separate legislation to reduce certain code requirements, though he admitted it faces difficult odds. Council expressed interest in testifying at future hearings and engaging directly with key committee members. Myers encouraged outreach to influential legislators on the housing committee and suggested the bill may face greater challenges in the Senate. He concluded by reiterating his commitment to advocating for his cities while continuing negotiations behind the scenes to seek workable amendments.

Myers addressed concerns regarding fraud and oversight of taxpayer dollars, acknowledging growing public frustration amid rising property taxes and increased demand for social services. He stated that conversations with Bureau of Criminal Apprehension officials suggest some fraud issues have persisted for nearly a decade, with instances where information was reportedly shared with departments but not acted

upon. He emphasized the need for stronger oversight and accountability at the administrative level.

Myers outlined several legislative efforts, including a bill he introduced that would give the legislature authority to remove high-level administrators or commissioners in cases involving gross negligence or misuse of taxpayer funds. He noted that other lawmakers, including Representative Robbins, have proposed more aggressive accountability measures. Additional proposals under discussion include strengthening the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), increasing unannounced audits and site visits—particularly for newer organizations receiving state funds—and extending the statute of limitations for fraud-related offenses from six to ten years.

Council members questioned the political viability of such reforms, especially in a short election-year session, and whether bipartisan support exists to ensure meaningful accountability. Andrew acknowledged the political challenges but stressed that fraud oversight is a major concern among constituents across party lines. He concluded that while there may be disagreement over how far reforms should go, there is strong public pressure to pass meaningful oversight measures, and he expressed hope that at least some bipartisan solution will advance this session.

d) Swamp Update

Moved to Business Items on the Regular City Council Meeting

**3) ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Reffkin, seconded by Vickery to adjourn the meeting at 6:48 p.m.

Motion passed 5-0.